untangle by bell_yay

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Summary:

Touching had never been Nancy's thing. She could do it, yes, but she didn't need it, not like touch-starved Jonathan. She knew from a look in his eyes that he was drifting off again into a dark place in his mind and needed something physical to bring him back. She rubbed her thumb back and forth, reminded him she was there.

Steve would be good at this, she thought.

She frowned. There she was thinking about Steve again.

Why couldn't she be happy? When she was with Steve, she wanted Jonathan. Now she's with Jonathan, she wants Steve. Why couldn't she just pick one?

(or: an epilogue)

untangle

It all seemed unnaturally quiet after. Hopper had radioed in. She'd done it. Eleven had closed the gate.

It was almost like white noise. The engine whirring, the breeze in the trees, Joyce's gentle shushing in the back seat as she cradled Will's head on her lap. Nancy had taken to white noise over this past year as a sleeping aid. Now she was wide awake.

Jonathan's hands were firm on the steering wheel. His face was twitching, trying to keep the tears at bay, but his eyes were red and welling up. His hands shook a little. He flexed them.

Nancy reached out, put her hand on his arm. He twitched and looked at her and relaxed. His eyes found the road again. Nancy left her hand on his thigh.

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Jonathan's thigh twitched, his eyes flicking towards her hand. She'd been clenching tight. She quickly held her hands in her lap.

Will whined a little in the back seat. Nancy eyed him.

Jonathan cleared his throat, gluggy.

"I hope Mike's alright," he said. It was for her benefit.

“He’ll be fine,” she sighed. “Steve’s good with kids.”

She shook her head. *Stupid. Steve, again, really?* Her face went red with guilt.

“You’re good with kids,” Jonathan offered. “Will likes you.”

Will’s eyes were closed, curled into Joyce’s touch. She gave Nancy a helpful smile.

“He does. I think they all like you.”

Nancy smiled tightly. She looked at her lap. All the times she’d yelled at Mike, or slammed the door in his face, never giving him the time of day. And Steve. *Steve*.

She shook her head.

“Yeah. Yeah. Sure.”

Jonathan looked at her, concern rippling off of him. She didn’t look back. He turned to the road.

Steve was just a figure in the distance, bumming around in Jonathan’s front yard, swinging his baseball bat to hit a scrap of hard rubbish into the bushes. Nancy’s heart leapt into her throat at the sight of him.

“Steve!”

“Nancy?”

His arms opened up as she raced towards him and they landed together, hugging and squeezing like she wasn’t dating -

“Jonathan.”

Jonathan kept a respectful distance, his usual small smile playing about his lips. He nodded hello. To Nancy’s surprise, Steve held an arm out, pulling Jonathan in for a three-way hug.

“You hear from the chief?”

“We’re good.”

Steve sighed, and laughed. Relieved.

“You guys are so sweaty. Gross.”

Jonathan’s laugh huffed against Nancy’s left ear. She smiled up at Steve.

“Oh my god, what happened to you?”

She gently touched one of the bruises around his eye, but he still winced. Jonathan smirked, picking at one of the band-aids.

“It’s a good look.”

Steve laughed incredulously.

“Yeah, well. Got my ass handed to me.” Steve shoved Jonathan’s shoulder. “Needed you around, Byers. Could’ve used a hand.”

“Who did this?” Nancy asked.

“Billy, that new asshole.” Steve played with the band-aid Jonathan had loosened, trying to stick it back in place. “Probably wanted to fuck me so bad he didn’t know what to do about it.”

Nancy caught Jonathan looking at his shoes, his face bright red.

Steve slapped him on the back and he coughed.

“Speaking of, Byers. Could use a hand with something.”

Jonathan made brief, panicked eye contact with Nancy. Steve was already trudging to the door.

“You coming?”

Jonathan looked at Nancy again. Followed. Nancy folded her arms from the cold and turned to watch the driveway, listening to her (boy?)friends drifting talk.

“Billy’s still out of it. Don’t know what to do with him.”

“What’d you give him?”

“His sister stuck him with the anaesthetic.”

“Do you think he could drive?”

“Yeah, that’s the question. And I don’t want him alone with any of the kids, anyway.”

“I could take them home -“

The screen door banged shut. Nancy watched the drive. She wondered what she just saw. She wondered what she was feeling. She waited for Eleven to come home.

Jonathan drove Nancy home in an empty car. Hopper wanted to stay with Joyce, Eleven wanted to stay with Mike, Mike wanted to stay with Will. It seemed a logical sleepover.

Nancy spent an awkward forty minutes sitting at the kitchen table, watching the boys alternate between hugging Will and hugging Eleven while Steve and Jonathan drove Billy and Max home. Steve had taken Billy’s car, Billy roughly shoved into the back seat by Steve (and straightened into a more comfortable position by Jonathan) and Max giving directions while Jonathan drove Steve’s car behind. She spent those forty minutes thinking. Thinking about Mike and his friends. Thinking about herself. Thinking about Jonathan and Steve.

Imagining what might be happening in that car.

She felt jealous. But only jealous that she wasn’t there with them.

She should have been there with them.

Jonathan pulled into her driveway and turned the engine off. It had been a silent ride over. Nancy imagined Steve arguing with Dustin and Lucas as he shouldered the burden of chaperoning them home. She looked over at Jonathan, staring out the windshield with his face

blank. She wondered if he was imagining Steve too.

“We should’ve all slept over tonight, don’t you think?” Nancy said. Jonathan stirred and rubbed his eyes.

“We still can, if you want,” he said. “I can take you back -“

“Thanks, but. I need to go home sometime.”

Jonathan nodded. She wanted to stay. She imagined trying to sleep tonight, still buzzing with adrenaline and what she’d seen. She imagined the warmth of the Byers’ household, of curling up with Jonathan again. She imagined Steve, trying to brave the night alone in his empty house -

There she went again. Imagining Steve.

She put her hand on the door handle.

“Nancy.”

“Yes?”

“Do you really not love Steve anymore?”

Jonathan’s voice was soft. He picked away at a worn spot on the steering wheel, his cheeks pink. Nancy’s face heated as well.

“I can’t love Steve.”

“Why not?”

Nancy felt her anger rising.

“Is this what you two talked about on the ride home?”

Jonathan looked at her in surprise, face red, before quickly averting his eyes again.

“No.”

Nancy eyed him.

“I can’t love Steve if I’m. If I’m *interested* in you.”

Silence. Jonathan’s steering wheel flaked away.

“You can’t love two people at once,” Nancy said with finality. She put her hand back on the door handle.

“Nancy.”

He was looking at her now. She felt her guts twist, like he could see into her very mind, see how much of it was occupied by Steve, but also how much was occupied by *him* and just how *confused* she was -

“If.” He swallowed a heavy weight. Closed his eyes so he didn’t have to look at her, which just made her look at him harder. “If someone was… in love. *Interested*. In two people. And both of those two people were interested in each other. Do you think they could… make it work?”

He looked at her again, sad but hopeful. Nancy’s breath was caught in her throat. Somehow she hadn’t expected this.

“Do you have a crush on Steve?” She just said it, like that. It wasn’t accusing, or a question, but an answer to the past twelve months and an answer to this conversation and an answer to everything she’d ever felt in her life. Jonathan went impossibly redder, squirming in his seat. He looked afraid, but he was smiling. He made a breathy sound, like he’d intended to say a word but an emotion came out instead.

“What happened in the car?” Jealous. Jonathan shook his head.

“Nothing! We just. Listened to music.” He shrugged and lowered his head, but he couldn’t keep the smile out of his voice. Nancy started to smile too, even though her logical mind told her not to.

“So we ask out Steve, is what you’re saying.”

“I don’t know.” Jonathan shrugged again, shrinking further into himself. “Do you have a crush on Steve?”

“Yes,” Nancy spat, angry at herself for needing Jonathan to prompt

her to it. “How do you even ask a third person out?”

“I don’t know.”

Nancy laughed. This was all so ridiculous. And she’d fought a monster.

“I’ll work it out,” Nancy said quietly. Jonathan looked at her brightly. She changed her tone. “We’ll have to do it right. This could go so wrong so fast, Jonathan, believe me.”

Jonathan nodded. He couldn’t keep the excitement off his face. He held the wheel, and let go of it, and didn’t know what to do with his hands so put them back on the wheel again.

“Great. Well.” He turned sheepish. “I told Steve to call when he got home safe, so.” His eyes darted away from Nancy’s, aglow with emotion. Nancy wondered if she looked the same.

“Can you tell him to call me, too?”

Jonathan nodded. They smiled at each other, both equally aflush with the embarrassment of untangling new feelings. Nancy leaned in and kissed him.

“We’ll wait till Christmas. If we feel the same, well.”

“Then,” Jonathan said. He nodded. He smiled.

Nancy opened the door.

“But we’ll keep an eye on him. Wouldn’t want him getting swept up by Billy.”

She swung out of the car and shut the door. Jonathan’s alarmed face followed her out the window.

“Do you think that would happen? Nancy?”

Nancy just looked over her shoulder, raised her eyebrows in a shrug. Jonathan set his mouth and reversed down the drive. He hesitated for a moment at the bottom, not sure what to do. He settled for a

thankful nod and sped away to answer Steve's phone call. Nancy smiled.

She looked up at her house, the warm orange lights glowing through the curtains. It was late, and dark, but something inside her felt safe now. Now that she had a plan.

She looked up at her bedroom window, where Steve would climb in to kiss her good night, where she had to convince Jonathan to share the bed, where she was about to answer Steve's phone call. She imagined all of these things happening there at once, all three of them, together.

Warmth. Something no monster could ever touch. Love.

Three people. Home.

Author's Note:

> this isnt the sequel i promised yall but honestly ive been rock hard for stranger things since 2016 so u have to deal with this first
> im listening to whip it on repeat and thinking about how piping hot billy was
> thanx for reading xx